

Strategic Planning: The Long View

Strategic planning is the process of defining the direction for an organization so it can reach its goal. Strategic planning is planning for the long haul. More specifically, strategic planning means identifying the board's mission, goals, and objectives and then devising policies and strategies to achieve those ends. Strategic planning will allow the board to anticipate the probable impact of its decisions on its constituency and to prepare a more detailed plan that specifies tasks, responsibilities, schedules, and costs for the endeavors to be pursued. Even though the mission and goals will not change much over time, strategic planning should include a formal evaluation and revision process to keep the objectives and activities current.

The strategic plan will serve as a "road map" for setting priorities, guiding decisions, and assessing progress in lowering seismic risk. This section describes a three-phase strategic planning process in the context of a statewide constituency; however, it is also fully applicable to a multi-state, local, or private-sector constituency.

The Process

The strategic planning process is as important as the plan itself. The process will result in the identification of "stakeholders" (persons who will be responsible for—or affected by—the resulting activities) and potential leaders for the cause of seismic safety. It can create open, collaborative channels of communication and lasting commitments.

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING
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THE PLAN ITSELF.

The first phase is information collection—the collection of information and opinions from board members and others who are essential to earthquake risk reduction and management efforts. Because perceptions will affect the program, they are as important as facts. The assessment must provide a current and comprehensive perspective of the state's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and obstacles. The information obtained in this phase will be the foundation of the strategic plan.

The second phase is the evaluation and integration of the information

collected. The information is presented and discussed in an open forum. A workshop or series of workshops involving the stakeholders and decision makers should be held to consider the

information gathered and chart a course of action. This collaborative exercise is a key element of strategic planning.

Formulating the strategic policies is the third phase, in which the results of the workshop are melded to develop the long-range policy guidance needed for preparing a detailed, action-specific, shorter-term earthquake risk reduction and management plan. Not only should the strategic plan be adopted by the board, but a commitment is needed to refine, improve, and update the strategic plan periodically.

Phase I: Collecting Information

The objective of the information collection phase is to obtain a current and comprehensive assessment on the state's earthquake risk reduction and

management needs and to identify stakeholders and leaders.

Crucial to the strategic planning process is identifying and interviewing stakeholders—individuals and entities with earthquake-related responsibilities who have significant influence on seismic risk management efforts. Stakeholders may represent external sources (the private sector, the legislature, local government) and internal sources (board members and staff). The selection of stakeholders must be balanced to ensure that no one group or discipline dominates.

Stakeholders should include persons with varied experience in academia, government, and the private sector, and other professionals, including earth scientists, engineers, emergency managers, mitigation specialists, and representatives of human services agencies.

The interview is used to obtain perspectives on the board's earthquake-related needs and, if appropriate, on the board's past performance. Questions should relate to strengths, weaknesses, obstacles, and opportunities for organizing existing conditions and programs within the field as well as required legal mandates.

In depth, face-to-face interviews by a strategic planner or other qualified personnel are better than telephone interviews and written solicitations. The interviewer must elicit information and perceptions about vulnerable facilities and seismic hazards, the potential for managing the risk and reducing vulnerability, and planning for emergency response and recovery. The interviewer should seek to identify clients and interest groups, potential leaders, personnel and monetary resources, and other sources of support

or opposition to the board's programs and objectives.

The information should be collected on "issue statement" forms. Each completed form should include a brief description of the issue or idea, supporting information, and recommended action. (Appendix G is an example of an issue statement.)

The information collected should be separated into four categories:

- *The state's strengths* (to capitalize on), such as academic and professional resources offering expertise in earth sciences and engineering, knowledgeable local government building officials, and the resources of emergency response and recovery organizations.
- *The state's weaknesses* (to strengthen), such as untrained building officials, out-of-date emergency response plans, and inventories of vulnerable buildings and lifelines.
- *Opportunities* (to exploit), such as private-sector interest in building codes, recent seismic events, and pending redevelopment programs.
- *Obstacles* (to overcome), such as shrinking sources of funding, loss of leadership, competing interests or needs, public apathy, and lack of awareness.

The information generated by this exercise will identify numerous issues and provide an overall profile of the topics to be considered during Phase II at the workshop. Issues can be grouped into themes. Together they will provide an initial assessment of the current situation. It should be stressed that the collection of information and the needs assessment do not require an excessive expenditure of time or money for detailed studies; indeed, detailed studies may be an element of the earthquake risk reduction and

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management plan discussed in the next chapter.

Phase II: Evaluating and Integrating

The purpose of the second phase is to assess the factual and perceived information and to agree on (and refine) a mission statement, goals and objectives, and prioritized action items.

One two- or three-day off-site workshop or two or three one-day workshops are recommended as a way to deliberate, evaluate, and integrate information using a variety of participants.

The workshop should explore basic assumptions, discuss desired outcomes, and consider potential timetables. Promising implementation strategies can be identified, along with processes for evaluating and measuring progress and making mid-course corrections. It is critical that proposed activities be realistic, given the current political climate and fiscal realities. In the end, a consensus should be reached regarding the board's overall mission and its fundamental goals and objectives.

Workshop participants must be selected carefully to include advisory board members, staff, and representative stakeholders who will influence or be responsible for the implementation of the strategic plan. If successful, the workshop will assist the board in solidifying its constituency, improving visibility, enhancing credibility and improving access to the expertise it will need to make its strategies effective. Since the number of persons attending the workshop must be kept to a manageable number, the selection process is important, and potential participants must be carefully screened.

Each attendee should receive in advance a clear statement of the workshop's purpose and expectations to encourage participants to come well prepared. Highlights of the information collection phase should be summarized and distributed in brief issue state-

ments prepared in a uniform format (see Appendix G).

The first order of business at the workshop is to review objectives and expectations. Sufficient time should be allowed for participants to review all issue statements and to become comfortable with the process and each other. After the opening plenary session, participants should break into smaller working groups to discuss the results of the data collection phase.

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INFORMATION AND
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CAN THEN BE IDENTIFIED.

The issue statements prepared in Phase I identify what must be addressed. Those statements also facilitate the formulation of action items by the working groups. It may be helpful if the issue statements are kept to a manageable number and if redundant statements are consolidated without losing the intent behind them. Related statements should be grouped. For example, a dozen statements concerning schools could be consolidated into three school-related topics such as strengthening school buildings, mitigating nonstructural hazards, and educating teachers and students on appropriate earthquake response.

Working groups can be assigned categories based on themes or issue statements. For example:

- Vulnerable buildings
- Societal vulnerability
- Seismic hazard identification
- Schools
- Public awareness and constituency
- Professional training
- Emergency response planning and mutual aid

Effective working groups typically have at least three to five persons. The group selects a chair, a recorder, and spokesperson to present the group's reports to the plenary session.

Working groups should consolidate the principal issues raised by the issue statements into proposed action items. Brainstorming (without criticizing or judging ideas) should be encouraged initially, followed by critical discussions. Action items are written up to summarize terms the following points:

- *Assumptions*—The premise for proposing the action item. Assumptions set the parameters and limiting conditions, including legislative, contractual, policy mandate, or other special considerations.
- *Objectives*—The proposed outcome or result of the action item. The components of the objective are:
 1. An assignment of responsibility
 2. A statement of the results expected or the desired level of performance
 3. A schedule for performance
- *Implementation*—The resources and research required, the foundation to be laid to perform the task, obstacles to be overcome and the basic implementation strategy.
- *Rationale*—The reasons underlying the working group's recommendations.
- *Consensus*—The desired areas of agreement needed among organizations and constituents on policy issues.
- *Evaluation*—Feedback mechanisms to assure that the work is on the right track.

Typical action items may include:

- Drafting proposed legislation to address building standards
- Creating voluntary programs to retrofit existing buildings and lifelines
- Training design professionals in seismic principles
- Improving quality control of new construction
- Abating nonstructural hazards in schools

- Supporting efforts to improve emergency response capability
- Encouraging earthquake response exercises
- Preparing recommendations (not regulations or mandates) for agencies with earthquake-related functions

After the working groups have had time to complete most of their work, the workshop should reconvene in plenary session. The products of the working groups are presented and reviewed. All workshop participants should have an opportunity to evaluate and discuss the recommendations. The entire group needs to clarify assumptions, integrate the variety of activities proposed, and decide on priorities. After discussion, the entire group should have a complete list of items.

Setting priorities is a critical step. The "nominal group technique" is one way to make decisions (see Figure 8-1 for an overview of the technique). The nominal group technique is a form of brainstorming that allows all participants an equal voice in establishing the whole group's priorities and rank-ordered selection of ideas. It is well suited to collecting different types of information, converting that information into reasonably consistent measures, identifying where breakdowns occur, and designing an improved process.

After workshop attendees discuss and rank the action items, they will have an opportunity to write (or review) a mission statement. A mission statement is a succinct statement of the fundamental objectives of the organization. It should be brief enough to be easily understood and remembered, general enough to cover the scope of the organization's work, yet provide specific direction. A mission statement may include elements addressing who the board is, what it is intended to do, and how it does it. This additional information, however, should not detract from the aim of being succinct and easily

understood. A possible mission statement is as follows:

The [state] Seismic Safety Advisory Board's mission is to improve the well-being of the people of [state] through cost-effective measures that lower earthquake risks to life and property.

Participants will also discuss and agree on long-term, fundamental goals. A goal is a statement of results to be achieved by the end of a period of time. Specific objectives or implementation strategies are identified and a process for evaluation (measuring progress and making mid-course corrections) can be discussed.

A sample workshop design, including a model agenda, is included in this manual as Appendix H. The design and agenda were adapted from an existing board's strategic planning session. The workshop will not result in a finished product. Follow-up work, including an opportunity for workshop participants to review their written products, will be necessary.

PHASE III PULLS TOGETHER
THE PRIORITIES AND
STRATEGIES FOR
IMPLEMENTING THE BOARD'S
MISSION.

Phase III: Deciding on Strategic Policies

After the workshop the board can refine the priorities and establish strategies for managing actions and for developing a shorter-term earthquake risk reduction and management plan. In this phase the board's contractors, staff, or volunteers first will need to compile and edit the workshop's results. A draft should be circulated to participants for comments before the board decides on the steps to take. After the review the board should formalize its mission statement, goals, objectives, and action items. The board will be faced with

tough decisions when balancing its own resources with the "wish list" that came from the workshop.

THE BOARD MUST ESTABLISH
A MECHANISM FOR FEEDBACK
AND A WAY TO EVALUATE
PROGRESS.

The next step will be to work out the details for action items. These details include tasks, schedules, responsibilities, needed resources, and references. At this point the board can either prepare a work plan and begin work or develop a comprehensive earthquake risk reduction and management plan described in the next section.

Conclusion

A collaborative strategic planning process can prepare the conceptual framework of a risk reduction and management plan. This process gives participants an opportunity to exchange views on an interdisciplinary basis, build understanding and commitment among those who will play a key role in carrying it out, and take ownership of the issues and programs. The process can prevent one agency, discipline, or point of view from pursuing a narrow, isolated interest when other action items are given higher priority or otherwise must go first. By involving persons who can promote the needs of "users"—who often are policy makers, school administrators, building users, design professionals, etc.—the mission and action items can focus on reducing and managing earthquake risk in more informed and effective ways.

Although the results of a board's efforts will not be perfect the first time, it is a critical step toward focusing the resources of the organization. The board may find it best to follow the plan and then repeat the strategic planning process in six months or a year to refine and improve the results.

Figure 8-1—Overview of a technique for conducting a workshop

The Nominal Group Technique

The nominal group process can be conducted by using the action items as topics of discussion. The process consists of five steps.¹

1. *Problem statement*—The matter to be decided is stated, discussed, and agreed on.
2. *Quiet period*—Five minutes of silence is provided to allow participants to consider ideas and solutions.
3. *Round robin*—Each participant responds, one at a time, by identifying each action item he or she feels is critical. If an action item merely restates another in slightly different terms, the two versions can be merged. This continues until all items are on flip charts for all to see.
4. *Bull session*—Participants discuss issues to clarify, consolidate, edit, or eliminate them. Once the list is complete, participants should be encouraged to argue why they believe certain items are important.
5. *Prioritization*—The ranking process recommended recognizes the difficulty in comparing and ranking disparate items.
 - Participant should pick the most important item and assign it the number that represents the total number of items being ranked.
 - The least important is given a "1."
 - Each person then selects the most important of those remaining and assigns it a score one less than before.
 - Then the least important of the remaining items is given a "2."
 - This process is repeated until arriving at the center.
 - Then the participants' rankings are collected, and the collective ranking for each action item is computed by adding. The action item with the highest total score is the one considered most important to the workshop participants.

As an example, a group of five participants might consider the following five hypothetical action items, ranking them accordingly:

Issues	Ranking by Participants					Total
A. Seek funds to strengthen older hospitals	4	4	4	5	4	21
B. Evaluate the seismic safety of school bldgs.	2	3	2	2	2	22
C. Map all active faults	3	2	3	3	3	14
D. Enforce special standards for new schools	5	5	5	4	5	24
E. Do research on liquefaction	1	1	1	1	1	5

In this example the safety of school buildings was awarded the highest overall score from the five participants, making it the issue accorded the highest priority by the participants. On the other hand, the liquefaction research, with a total score of 5, is accorded the lowest priority.

¹ R. C. Whiteley, *The Customer-Driven Company: Moving from Talk to Action*, Addison Wesley, 1991, pp. 266-67.